



Allina Health Neighborhood Health Connection

Executive summary of the findings from the 2013 Healthy Activity grant program evaluation

Allina Health Community Benefit and Engagement's (noted as "Allina Health") Neighborhood Health Connection (NHC) program provides funding to projects that help residents build connections while participating in activities that encourage physical activity and/or healthy eating. In 2013, Allina Health awarded grants to 73 organizations and groups of neighbors in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. In addition to receiving financial support, the grantees also receive communications support and technical assistance from an Allina Health Community Engagement Lead, a regional coordinator. Wilder Research was contracted to evaluate the impact of the initiative and help Allina Health consider ways to improve their future grantmaking efforts.

About the evaluation

A multi-method data collection strategy was developed to evaluate that initiative and respond to the following key questions:

- Were the grantee programs successful in increasing social connections among participants?
- Did participating residents report increased use of healthy behaviors (physical activity and healthy eating)?
- What is the role of health care in this work? Does the regional technical assistance model seem to support grantees in building social connections and increasing healthy behavior in communities?

The data collection strategies used in the evaluation included a review of grantee applications, an online grantee survey, a written/online participant survey, and a series of key informant interviews with Allina Health Community Engagement Leads. All nine leads participated in the key informant interview, and the grantee survey was completed by 68 of the 70 NHC grantees who implemented projects, a response rate of 97 percent. The response rate for the NHC participant survey was much lower; it was completed by only 12 percent of the estimated 3,651 eligible adults. Due to the low response rate, the findings from the participant survey should be interpreted with caution, as the experiences of this small group of participants may not be reflective of all NHC participants.

About the grantees

Grants were awarded to 73 organizations and groups of neighbors in Minnesota and western Wisconsin. These projects varied considerably in their structure, target population, and area(s) of focus. Most of the grantees (77%) implemented projects that used ongoing events; 14 projects implemented only one-time events. In total, 46 grantees reported that older adults (age 65 or older) participated in their activities.

6,335 residents participated in NHC-funded activities. The level of involvement among these residents and the number reached by each funded project varied considerably.

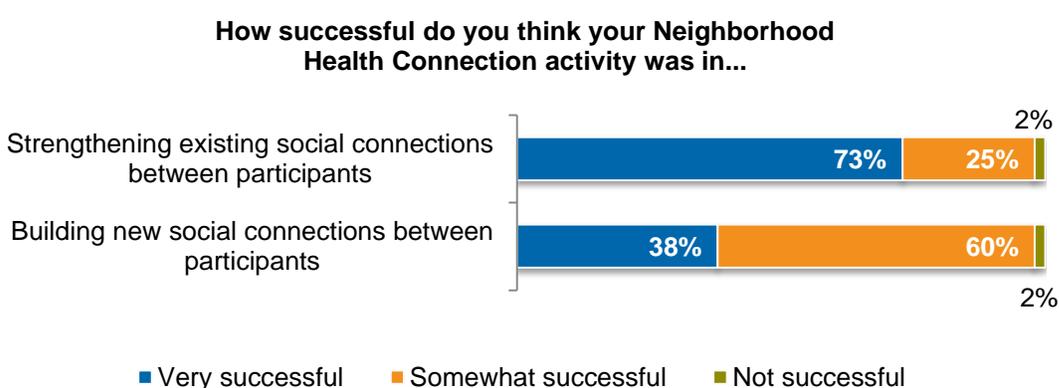
Most of the grantees were successful in reaching their target population and recruitment goals. About half (48%) of the grantees met the recruitment goals from their application and an additional 28 percent of grantees exceeded their recruitment goals. Ten grantees reached fewer participants than they had hoped, citing poor weather, busy schedules (among potential participants), and difficulty marketing their activities as common barriers to recruitment.

Summary of key findings

Project impact: building social connections

Nearly all grantees indicated that their activities helped increase participants' social connections. The grantees were more likely to rate their project as “very successful” at helping participants enhance existing relationships (73%) than in building new relationships (38%) (Figure 1).

1. Grantee perceptions of changes in social connections (N=65-67)



One-time events were more successful in generating new social connections. Half of the grantees (50%) who implemented projects with one-time events felt they were “very successful” in helping participants make new social connections. Fewer grantees who implemented projects with ongoing events (46%) or a combination of one-time and ongoing events (28%) rated their work as “very successful” (Figure 2).

2 Grantee perceptions of changes in new social connections, by type of event

How successful do you think your Neighborhood Health Connection activity was in building new social connections between participants?

Type of event	Very successful	Somewhat successful	Not successful
One-time event(s) (N=14)	7 (50%)	7 (50%)	0 (0%)
Ongoing events (N=22)	10 (46%)	12 (55%)	0 (0%)
A combination of one-time and ongoing events (N=29)	8 (28%)	20 (69%)	1 (3%)

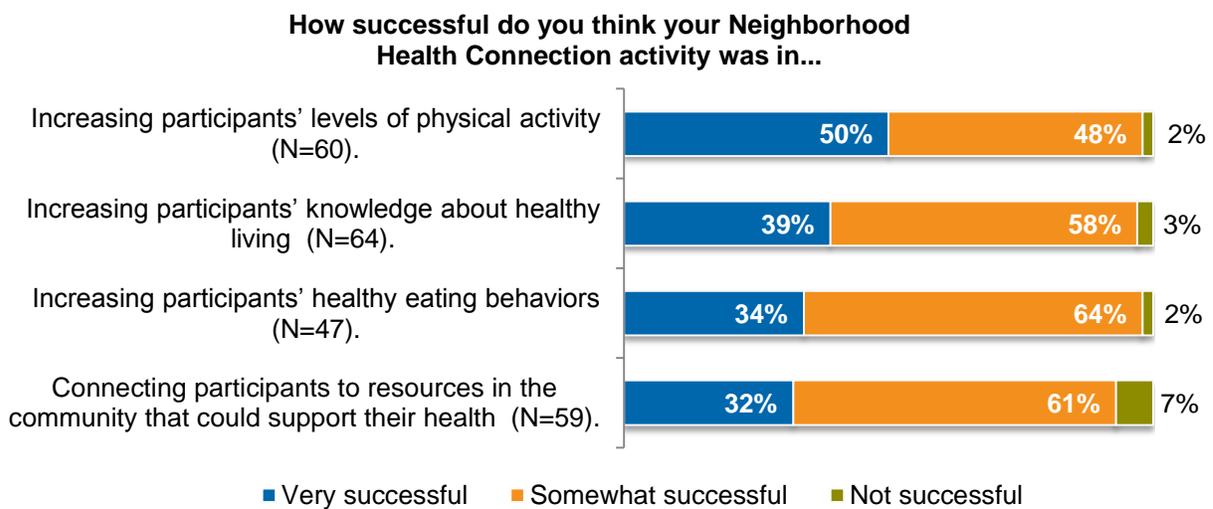
The participants who completed the survey also reported changes in their social connections. A majority of the participants reported that as a result of being involved with the NHC activity they strengthened existing relationships (86%) and built new

relationships (71%). Most participants (92%) felt they would continue to maintain these new relationships. Many participants (74%) also reported making new connections to community resources.

Project impact: improving health behaviors

To various degrees, the Neighborhood Health Connection activities influenced participants’ healthy behaviors, knowledge of health, and access to resources to support health. Half of grantees (50%) reported that their Neighborhood Health Connection activity was “very successful” in increasing participants’ levels of physical activity, while less than half indicated that they were “very successful” in increasing participants’ knowledge about healthy living (39%), increasing their healthy eating behaviors (34%), and connecting participants to resources in the community that could support their health (32%) (Figure 3).

3. Grantee perceptions of changes in behavior



Note: Not all grantees organized activities that focused on physical activity or healthy eating.

Ongoing Neighborhood Health Connection activities were more successful in increasing participants’ physical activity. Grantees who implemented a combination of one-time/ongoing events and ongoing events were more likely to report (58% and 50% respectively) being “very successful” in helping participants increase their level of physical activity (Figure 4).

4. Grantee perceptions of changes in physical activity, by type of event

How successful do you think your Neighborhood Health Connection activity was in increasing participants' level of physical activity?

Type of event	Very successful	Somewhat successful	Not successful
One-time event(s) (N=12)	4 (33%)	8 (67%)	0 (0%)
Ongoing events (N=22)	11 (50%)	11 (50%)	0 (0%)
A combination of one-time and ongoing events (N=26)	15 (58%)	10 (39%)	1 (4%)

Results from the participant survey also suggest some individuals made changes in their behavior as a result of their participation in an NHC-funded activity. Half of the participants reported that as a result of their involvement with the activity, they were more physically active (50%) and/or ate more healthy meals and snacks (51%) now than six months before.

Other key lessons learned

Projects that implemented a series of events had more success fostering social connections and supporting changes in healthy behavior. Grantees who implemented on-going events were more likely to report being “very successful” in helping participants strengthen existing relationships (74-77%) and increase their level of physical activity. In addition, participants who took part in at least six activities were more likely to report that they increased their physical activity (61%) and healthy eating (55-61%) than those who did not.

Although one-time events are not successful strategies for increasing social connections, they can serve an important purpose. Grantees who implemented one-time events were more likely to report being “very successful” in helping participants make new social connections (50%), increase their knowledge about health (46%), and connect to community resources (39%).

The 34 grantees who requested technical assistance found it to be helpful. The most common types of materials and supports given to the grantees included health education and promotion materials, help making connections to other organizations, and support planning, implementing, and marketing their activities. The community engagement leads who provided the support felt they had adequate time to help the grantees, but identified needs for greater coordination to identify Allina Health resources and clarification on the scope of support they can provide to grantees.

Most grantees felt that their work would continue. Although sustainability was not an expectation of the NHC funding, over three-quarters of grantees (78%) thought it was “very likely” that their work would continue.

Overall, the grantees were pleased with their experience. Most (86%) “strongly agreed” that they would likely apply for another Neighborhood Health Connection grant.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were developed as opportunities for Allina Health to further enhance the effectiveness and impact of the Neighborhood Health Connection program:

- Determine whether support for one-time events should be included in future NHC grantmaking efforts.
- Develop a program theory of change to focus future youth-oriented programs on activities that build neighborhood cohesion and school connectedness.
- Consider lengthening the grant period to create more opportunities for participants to be involved in ongoing activities that support physical activity and healthy eating.
- Clarify expectations about the role of community engagement leads in providing technical assistance to grantees and proactive support to potential grant applicants.
- Modify future evaluation activities to reflect any changes in NHC program scope and priorities; consider integrating follow-up activities to assess the sustainability of programs.

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For more information

This summary presents highlights of Allina Health Neighborhood Health Connection: Findings from the 2013 Health Activity grant program evaluation.

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